



PRESS RELEASE

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OPERATION FALLING STAR CUTS FLOW OF CASH TO DRUG ORGANIZATION

PHOENIX - U.S. Attorney Paul K. Charlton and DEA Special Agent-in Charge Timothy J. Landrum today announce the results of an 8-month investigation that culminated on Monday, July 18, 2005 with the arrests of Nkosi Oji Burton, 30; Johnie Lee Ankton, 34; and Dajuan Torrence, 30, all of Phoenix. The three are accused of being a part of a nationwide marijuana trafficking organization responsible for smuggling multi-ton quantities of marijuana to Detroit, Michigan and other areas within the United States and returning millions of dollars in bulk currency back to Mexico. Also named in the July 7, 2005 federal indictment are Israel Corral, 43, known to have lived previously in Ariz. and Larry Wayne Nunley, 52, of North Carolina, who remain at large.

Arizona's *Operation Falling Star* is part of the first operational successes of DEA's nationwide "*Money Trail Initiative*." The impact of this investigation in Arizona has led to the disruption of the Arizona based command and control structure of the organization and effectively crippled their ability to operate. On Monday, July 18, several search warrants were executed by a multi-agency task force led by DEA. Agents seized \$179,700 in currency, six vehicles valued at approximately \$250,000 and a farmhouse property in Gilbert, Ariz. valued at approximately \$750,000. During the 8-month long investigation approximately 2,200 pounds of marijuana were also seized with an approximate loss of \$1.1 million dollars to the Arizona operation.

During the execution of yesterday's search warrant at the Gilbert, Ariz. location, a subterranean tunnel was discovered underneath the farmhouse. The spacious tunnel, with a hidden entrance in the residence, connected the house to a separate outside enclosure. No arrests were made at that home.

U.S. Attorney Paul K. Charlton stated that, "Drug organizations need to know that their drug shipments and financial trails will be targeted to disrupt their ability to operate throughout Arizona

and beyond. We have a vast network of federal, state and local agency resources to identify and target their operations."

DEA Special Agent in Charge Timothy J. Landrum said, "*Operation Falling Star* clearly illustrates how money fuels the drug trade, and attacking these illicit profits is the key to dismantling drug organizations. This operation is a testament to the spirit of cooperation and teamwork that DEA enjoys with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies."

"Our partnership with the DEA continues to ensure a safe and higher quality of life for the citizens of our communities," said Assistant Police Chief Kevin Robinson, Investigations Division, Phoenix Police Department.

The July 7, 2005 federal indictment charges the defendants with Conspiracy to Posses with Intent to Distribute Marijuana and Aiding and Abetting and also contains a Forfeiture Allegation. If convicted on the charges, each defendant currently in custody could be sentenced to a mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison up to life in prison, a \$4 million fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, the judge will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Burton, Torrence and Ankton are currently in federal custody. A detention hearing for Burton is set for July 20, 2005 at 4:30 p.m. in front of Magistrate Judge Virginia A. Mathis. A detention hearing for Torrence and Ankton is set for July 21, 2005 at 2:00 p.m. in front of Magistrate Judge Mathis. The trial date for all three defendants is set for September 6, 2005 in front of U.S. District Judge Frederick J. Martone in Phoenix.

The investigation preceding the indictment was initiated in March 2004 and was conducted by DEA, IRS, ICE, FBI, ATF, U.S. Marshal's Service, Phoenix Police Department, Scottsdale Police Department, Mesa Police Department, Chandler Police Department, the Maricopa County Attorney's Office and the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

An indictment is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The prosecution is being handled by John Boyle, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

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